



nerej

How the new suburban office can compete for talent by design

September 10, 2015 - Front Section

Companies are looking to hire again, seeking the brightest talents as they enter the workforce. For firms based outside of an urban center recruiting new graduates can be a greater challenge, as young professionals are often drawn to hip downtown locations with amenities close-by. In actuality, suburban offices have plenty of underleveraged assets. These companies can cultivate a different kind of creative, collaborative workspace with customized amenities focused on workplace flexibility, wellness, and convenience.

College campuses can be a source of inspiration as companies look to stay relevant in this arms race for talent. Here are some of the ways companies can incorporate the strengths of the college campus into the suburban corporate workplace:

Create flexible workspaces: Having some open space or flex space can be an antidote to the stodginess of the traditional sea of cubicles, and also draws upon a recent graduate's experience of studying in the residence hall, library, student union, lab, or on the quad. Playing to the nomadic study habits students grow accustomed to at school, a diversity of workspaces in the office can empower employees with choices in finding the right spaces to perform different kinds of work. Without the restrictions of one personal workspace employees can engage in more spontaneous collaboration, brainstorming in a corner nook or grabbing a café table for an impromptu meeting. The whole office can be your workspace. Flex space does not require a huge investment, and suburban offices generally have more space to allocate to these uses than their urban counterparts.

Take advantage of the outdoors: Many employees, especially those that live in the urban core, revel in the chance to be outside during the work day. Getting outside for lunch or to have a quick meeting can be helpful for productivity and concentration, and the right features can even boost healthy activities during and after working hours. Investing in inviting outdoor space can be a boon for employee health, morale, and social connection.

Make work-life more convenient: Having an on-site gym, dry-cleaning services, bike storage, and a cafeteria or café with healthy choices is compelling to employees who are used to the convenience built into life on a college campus. Local companies like Sun Life Financial and athenahealth go a step further—taking cues from tech giants like Facebook or Google—they run shuttles to the office to make commutes easier.

Invest in the workplace your employees want: A suburban location offers potential for innovative, forward-thinking companies to do things a little differently than city-based companies. In Massachusetts, both Osram and Wolverine are currently transforming their suburban offices into leading-edge workplaces that are designed for collaboration and wellness. These offices are a whole different animal from the corporate campuses popular in the 1980s. They are people-oriented, incorporating far more flex space, access to the outdoors, and convenient amenities, enabling these

companies to attract and retain the next generation of employees. Suburban campuses have the space to provide these amenities, and can overcome the image of the bland corporate office park by investing in the natural assets this location provides. As companies vie for attracting and retaining a changing workforce, they can learn from school campuses that long ago figured out how to leverage their campuses to create comfortable and inspiring microcosms that nourish happy, healthy, and productive communities.

Victor Vizgaitis, AIA, LEED AP, is a principal at Sasaki Associates, Watertown, MA.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540